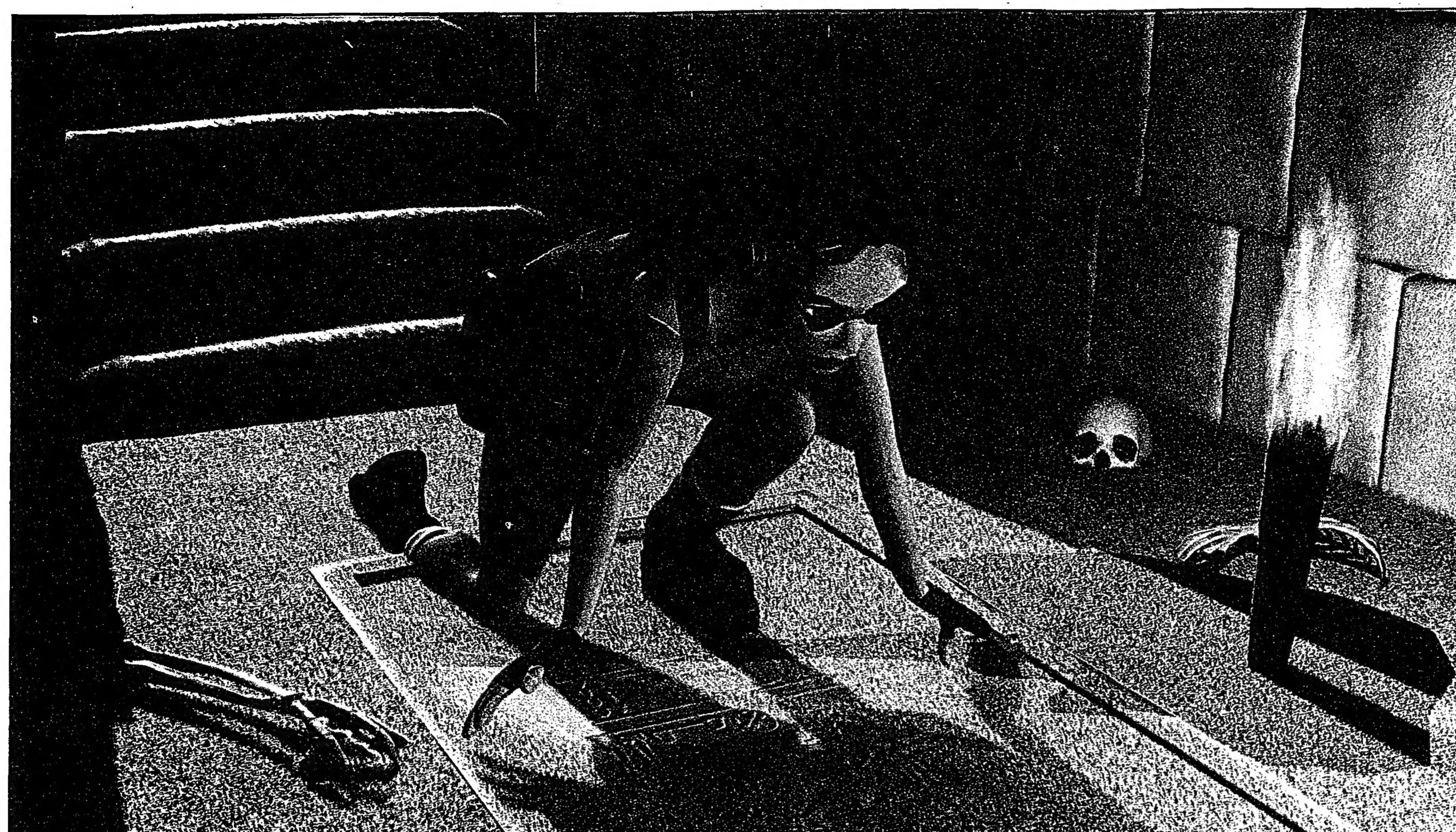
Down among the dead millennium survival guide



Thanks to the notebook she discovered at The Times, Lara has found a lost tomb in the Valley of the Kings - a tomb she is certain is that of the widow of Tutankhamun. Lara's Egyptologist contact died in mysterious circumstances and she herself was nearly murdered. But now, in the sixth episode of ERICA WAGNER's tale, Lara finds herself before the very door of the tomb.

CLAY SEALS. BROKEN once, it looked like, but then sealed again not long after; a cartouche of hieroglyphs was clear in the dried earth. Sweat ran into Lara's eyes and stung when she blinked but she hardly noticed that or the ache in her back or the searing pain in her ribs. She'd been digging for nearly three hours and now this - how had she found this? She thought of Carter, digging, digging, year after year, begging for money and then suddenly - well, she supposed, he could just as easily have found Tutankhamun sooner rather than later. But Lara knew this wasn't luck. She was meant to find this. Whoever had stolen the pages from the notebook had found this place and brought her here to - what? Lara's fear vanished in the excitement of this discovery. Her heart beat hard in her chest. She folded her spade carefully, put it back in her bag, and stood before the door. She did not recognise what she felt, at first: then she

thought it might be reverence. The clay crumbled easily beneath her hand. The doors of the tomb swung open with an ease that frightened Lara; they made no noise, as if they might have been oiled the night before. Once through the doors she found herself in a long stone tunnel, cool as a cave; she shivered as her sweat began to dry and drew her torch from her belt. Twenty paces: a second set of doors, more clay seals. She peered at them, shining her torch on them and thinking of the centuries and centuries they had been in the lightless black. A shudder ran over her scalp and through her shoulders and she remembered how someone had told her once, when she

was a girl: that means someone's walking over your grave. Again, she broke the seals. No way to go but forward. Again the doors swung open and when the jackal-headed man lunged at her, she screamed. "God damn - " The blackened wood of the statue, dried out for aeons below the surface of the desert, cracked when it struck the stone floor. Anubis, the god of the mortuary, had stood guard over the

tomb for all this time; Lara had practically walked into his arms. Pulling herself out from underneath him - the figure was nearly as large as she was - she shone her light on his finely carved face, his long eyes leafed with gold. Beautiful and still he lay beside her, his ears cocked, it seemed, attentively. Her heart thumped. His gaze did not meet hers. Only a statue. Lara rose and walked on. An antechamber, piled with grave goods. Boats, beds, bot-

tles; alabaster, ebony and gold. Lara had to remind herself to breathe as she picked her way through the objects; some of them smashed and jumbled. The resealing: someone else had been here, a long time ago. What ancient breath was in her lungs? The air smelled dryly of dust and old wood.

The walls of the first room were white, washed with lime, she guessed. But then behind another door - more seals, don't pay any attention, Lara told herself, just get through the door - everything was different. Here the floor was nearly bare, and it was easy to place her feet: but the walls crawled with figured paintings and inscriptions, clear as on the day they were written. "Fear and tremble, you violent ones who are in the storm clouds of the sky. He split open the earth by means of what he knew on the day when he wished to come there."

Then she saw it. As she shone her torch into the chamber its little light caught on a rounded shoulder of stone. Shining; black as basalt. All around were stone blocks,

again, made sure. What had happened to those thieves? She suddenly couldn't help but recall Corelli's Gothic curse. Somehow the calmness of her dismissal of it in the tranquility of The Times's archive would not return to her. All the same she made herself walk towards the sarcophagus. Lying down it stood as high as her chest; she had to stand on tiptoe to peer into the stone face.

It was wide and impassive, unreadable. And yet the features, it seemed to her, were surely feminine; there was a delicacy about the mouth and eyes, even - Lara thought - a certain sadness. She shone her light around the rim of the sarcophagus, and almost instantly saw the cartouche she barely believed she would ever see.

Ankhesenamun. She smiled in the darkness: but then caught sight of the great emerald scarab set into the breast of the great coffin.

Lara put out her hand to touch it. Oddly, it seemed almost warm against her fingers. No, it was warm: she touched the sarcophagus then the scarab, back and forth a few times. She was not imagining that. Under her fingers, too, she could feel scratches in the stone, as if someone had tried to claw the jewel away and been interrupted. Was this the jewel the notebook had spoken of? What was its power? Lara's innate scepticism poured from her like sand from a glass. It was hard not to believe something, faced with this. She reached her hand out, ready to try to take the jewel, when she heard a familiar, chilling click behind her. "Not an inch farther, Miss Croft; not if you have any affection for the back of your head."

The next instalment of Down among the Dead will appear on Saturday January 1.



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EXCLUSIVE READER OFFER smashed, as if they had been broken with a sledgehammer: the remains of a square outer coffin, smashed by the thieves who must have been here before her. Lara blinked, looked FAMILY HOLIDAYS TO EGYPT TO BE WON From now until the New Year, The Times, Eidos and Microsoft are giving you the chance to win some fantastic prizes. But there is a catch - you have to solve Lara's seven riddles. Each individual riddle offers the chance to win Lara Croft merchandise. Solving all seven gives the chance to win a

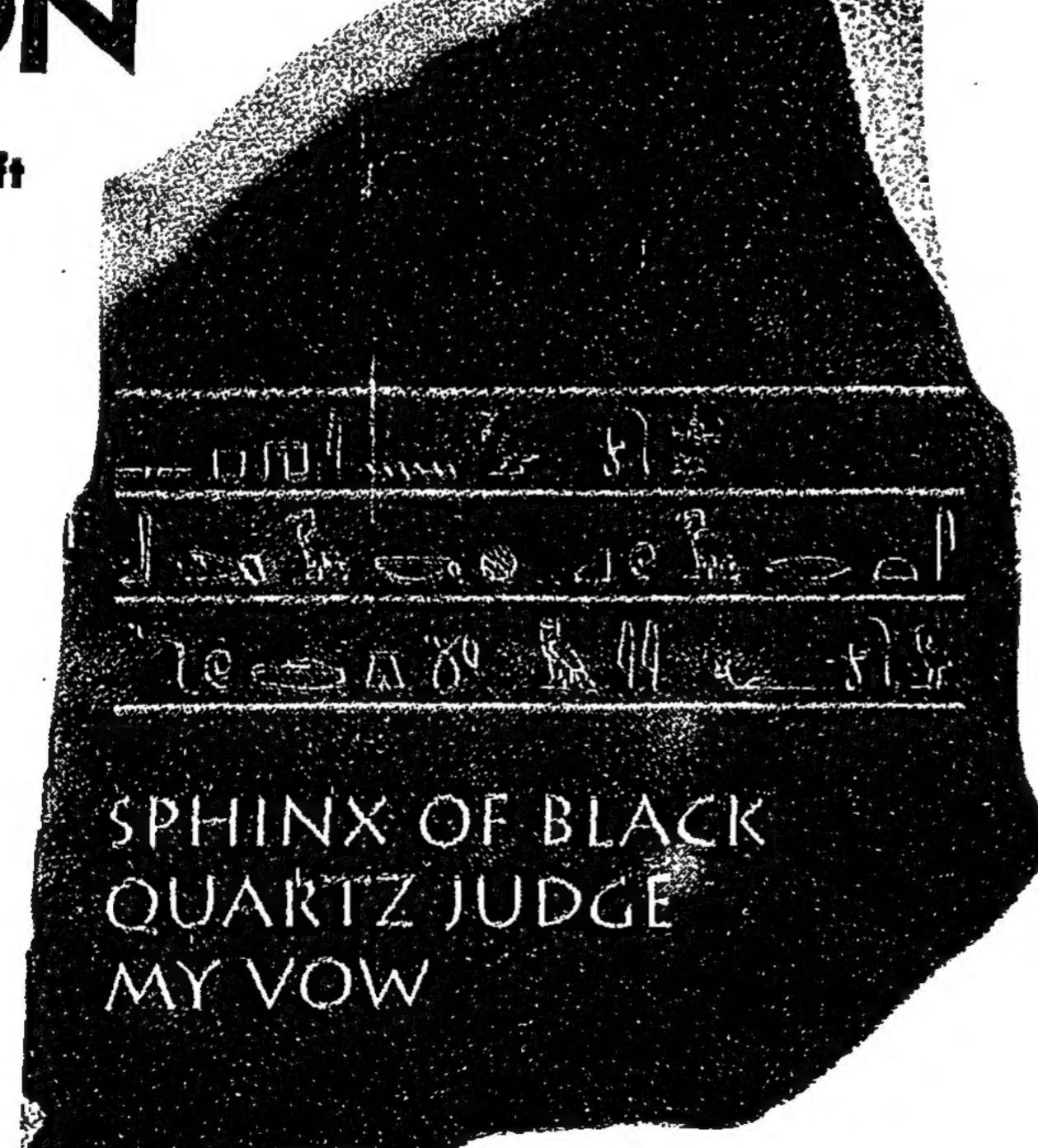
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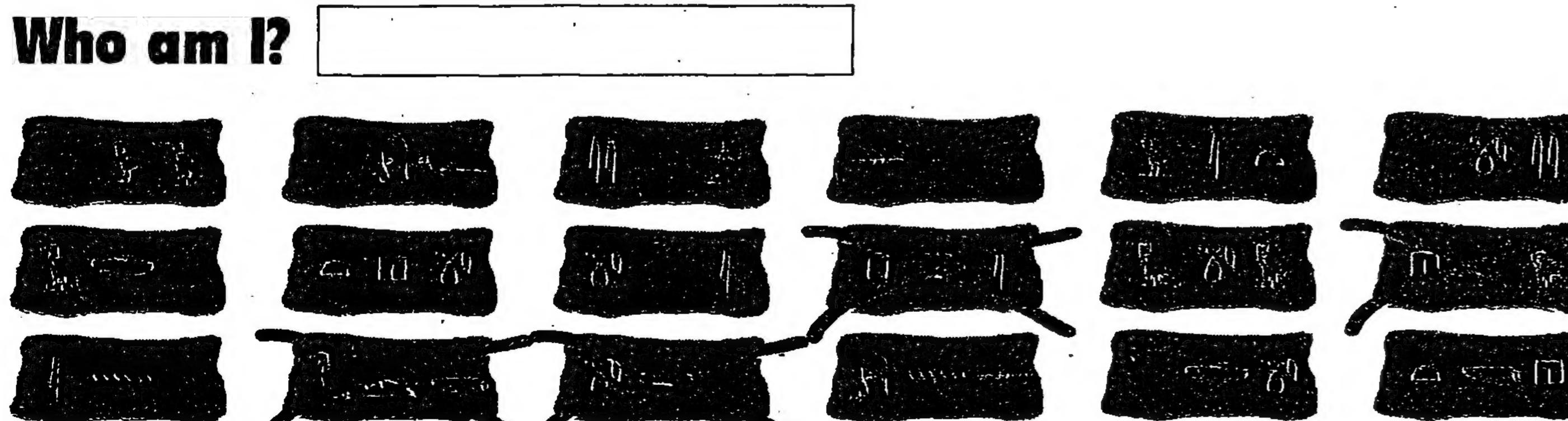
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ONE WEEKLY SECOND PRIZE: Tomb Raider games 1, 2, 3 and 4, Lara Desk Statue, Lara Wallet, Bath Towel, Half Zip fleece, Lara Analogue watch, Lara Ladies watch, Lara T Shirt, Lara Mousemat, one copy of Microsoft Encarta Reference Suite 2000

FOUR WEEKLY THIRD PRIZES: Lara desk statue, Lara Bath towel, Lara wallet, Lara Bobble hat, Lara Polo shirt, Lara Mousemat EIGHTY WEEKLY FOURTH PRIZES: Lara T-shirt, Lara Key Fob

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